

“CHRISTMAS”
A Sermon Preached by
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(transcribed from audio file)

The Word of the Lord tonight comes first from Isaiah 9:2-7. Let us hear what God is saying to us this evening.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied exultation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Great will be his authority,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness*

*from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

NRSVue

The Word of the Lord now comes from Luke 2:1-20.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,¹ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them. *NRSVue*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Recently I went to the Fox to see the Wiz, which was phenomenal, by the way. When we went to find our seats, our seats were smack dab in the middle of the row. And while we were not late when we got there it seemed like everyone else had taken their seats and we needed to be in the middle. So, I said “Excuse me. Can I just squeeze past you there? Our seats are there.” And the folks sitting there nodded and just sat there and waited for me to squeeze through. And so I did. You know how awkward it is when people don’t get up to give you a little bit more space? So, I was just regularly “Excuse me. Pardon me. Can I just squeeze through here?” Trying not to step on any feet and I just squeezed in. Technically I didn’t have to ask because we had bought the tickets. I was going to get to those seats no matter what. It was just out of politeness, as of courtesy.

When a very pregnant Mary and Joseph showed up for the census to a crowded Bethlehem that was so full that the actual rooms were taken, I imagine Mary and Joseph asked, “Is there room for us here?” And the innkeeper, or whoever they stayed with responded with something like “We could probably squeeze you in somewhere. Maybe with the animals, but we could probably squeeze you in.”

So, baby Jesus was squeezed on in and potentially was a bit of an inconvenience for whoever else was there and I think perhaps even kept the animals up all night. It’s easy, it’s easy to look back and think “Wow. Really? We couldn’t have made more room for the son of God.” But we do that often with God, don’t we? When God says, “Is there room for me in your life?” We respond with “Yeah! I could probably squeeze you in somewhere. Maybe in whatever left over time or space I may or may not have.”

We do that to the creator of heaven and earth. The creator of heaven and earth is often squeezed into our lives in the midst of hustle and bustle and other things we have needs that are more important.

The good news tonight is that is not God’s response to us. When things get hard. When we turn to God in the darkest times and ask, “Are you there, God? Do you have a minute? Is there room for me?”

God’s response to us is not, “Maybe I can squeeze you in somewhere. Maybe in a couple of months when my schedule frees up.”

When we ask God, “Do you have room for me?” God’s answer is always “Yes”. In fact, God’s response is “There is room for all.”

As verse 10 in our passage this evening says, The angel said to them, “*Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:*

So, yeah, let’s dig into that scripture a bit more. Let’s just sit into it. It’s interesting these narratives of the birth of Jesus because they’re meant to give you a kind of peak ahead as to what the ministry is going to be like. And what’s really interesting here is that there are only 2 verses there that talk about the actual birth of Jesus. You’ve got a bunch of verses in the beginning letting you know this fulfills the prophecy of Micah, that he will be born in the city of David, in the town of Bethlehem. Then you get the 2 little verses. Oh yeah, he was born. Then we’re off on this kind of remix extended story about shepherds. Shepherds! Who cares?

They hear the wonderful news. They come to visit Mary. They don’t tell Mary anything that she doesn’t already know. You know? It’s actually quite gracious of her. She heard these words and she treasured them in her heart and that’s great, but they’re not bringing anything new. She knew the magnitude of what was going on. She had carried this baby full term. She knew exactly what was going on here.

But shepherds are given such a prominent place in the story. Matthew does the same thing. If we were reading the Matthew version, it’s like a little bit of this, then the birth of Jesus and then there’s the Wise Men. Blah, blah, blah of Wise Men for verse after verse after verse. Why?

In Luke you get the long story about the dirty, scroungy shepherds who usually hang out on the fringe being brought into the main theme.

And in Matthew you get the story of the pagan Maji from the east who get to come in from the edges of the scene and be brought into center stage of the story of the birth of Jesus. I don’t think that’s a mistake. I think it’s a foreshadow to let you know that thing that is about to happen in the coming of Jesus into the world, it is going to involve making room for a lot more people than you thought. And a lot more people are now going to be in the room.

Because if God can reach from heaven down to a manger, then surely God can reach between me and you, between shepherds and Maji. To realize just how much this keeps going, as it goes through the gospel of Luke it continues with Jesus breaking down barriers, making the room bigger and bigger at every turn.

He doesn’t just heal a leper, he touches the leper, breaking the norms of connection for a social outcast like that.

When he tells the parable of the great banquet, the honored guests are the ones that are kicked out and it is the marginalized that are invited in and given the seat of honor.

In the story of Zaccheus, you have one who has turned his back on his own people, literally robbed them of their money and Jesus makes him the center of that story and sits down in the room with him.

It just keeps going like this. You get a story of a good Samaritan, a religious enemy of the people and that one is brought into center stage. There is room for the Samaritan.

Then in Luke, we have the story of the prodigal son, the one who squanders his inheritance and then comes back, and he is not just squeezed into the back of the room, but is made the center of a celebration party.

Again and again, Luke is giving us a gospel that echoes what we've already seen here in the beginning that this is going to be a ministry and mission that breaks down walls and just makes the room where we find ourselves, bigger and bigger.

Now here's the point in Christmas Eve sermon where like I could take a classic Pastor Rob twist and you take this story and now it's gonna turn into how we need to work harder in our faith, we need to be bigger in our faith. We need to be out there serving in the community. Right? Blah, blah, blah, Pastor Rob. He does that all the time, right?

I don't want to take that easy route today. I think instead, it's important and it's the right message, but just for today let's just stop here at this manger scene and let's consider what that might mean for you. Let's consider the idea that it's not just that there is room for all, but specifically that there is room for you.....and you.....and you. We can get so caught up in the acts of our faith that we forget to really fully accept the truth that can give us all the fuel and all the faith that we need to live out this ministry and mission that Jesus has given to us.

If we could each fully receive and accept that there is room for you.....that there is room for me, that each one of us could fully see that in the midst of what is God is doing, there is room for me.

I think that community that we all hunger for would just happen naturally. I think that that service out to the community, that living out of the ministry and mission that Christ has given to us, I think that would just come if we each would just fully receive the truth and that is that God's love is so great that there is room for even

someone like you. And there's nothing, there is nothing that you can do or no label that the world can put on you or judgment or marginalizing of you, or pushing of you aside, there is none of that that can happen to separate you from the love of God. And if we each could just fully receive that, that might be the best Christmas message for us to get today.

To believe that this light from the Christ candle as it goes out is not something meant for the holy, the righteous. It's meant for the marginalized. It's meant for the dirty shepherd, the weird pagan Maji from the east, the Zaccheus' out there who steal from us. It's meant to be a light that is given to all because God has made room for all.

The light does not care about your labels or your past. It does not depend upon your holiness. The light is the light of Christ and it is enough, enough for you. I invite you now to share this light with those around you.